



Staff Sgts. Scott Dooley (L) and Tommy Money and their fellow trumpeters in the concert band.

A.F. PHOTO

Following the Band

by Ruth Ezell

Living St. Louis producer Ruth Ezell devotes an entire show to the music of the U.S.A.F. Band of Mid-America.

Scott Air Force Base is best known to the public for its roles in providing transportation by air, land and sea to the Defense Department, among other logistical responsibilities. But to veterans and music lovers in-the-know, there's another mission carried out by a group of service members based at Scott that's crucial to boosting morale and spreading goodwill.



Ruth Ezell

MATT THIELSKAMP

They are the musicians who make up the U.S. Air Force Band of Mid-America and

two related music groups: Starlifter (which plays a wide range of pop songs) and Shades of Blue (a jazz ensemble). For these talented musical ambassadors, performing at the base and on the road is a full-time job.

I've made the musicians at Scott the subject of a *Living St. Louis* special airing January 30. Before I started this project, I had already known about the jazz ensemble's reputation. My original plan was to do a segment strictly on Shades of Blue, until I learned just how extensive Scott's music program is.

As this issue of *KETC Guide* is going to press, there are still three remaining days of taping before the next phase of production begins. This process started last September, when *Living St. Louis* photographer Scot Page and I made the first of three visits to the base. On that first trip, the band was playing at a change of command and retirement ceremony in honor of Gen. John Handy (who retired as commander of the United States Transportation

Command and Air Mobility Command) and his successor, Gen. Norton Schwartz. The day was gruelingly hot, the ceremony was outdoors, and a few people on the



Captain and conductor Don Schofield.

A.F. PHOTO

parade field fell victim to the high temperatures. But the band members—who spent a total of three and a half hours on the field—prevailed over Mother Nature, and their performance didn't skip a beat. Their professionalism and love of what they do has shown consistently through the months I've followed these musicians.

In addition to the air base visits, I've traveled to Vandalia, Illinois; Florissant and Jefferson City for concerts. I've interviewed several musicians about the paths that led them to become military performers. Band members from previous generations also share their experiences.

The current commander and conductor of the U.S.A.F. Band of Mid-America is Capt. Don Schofield. He's a crowd-pleaser whose charisma and conducting skills set the tone for all the band's performances. At the Florissant concert, I saw him pluck a little girl (about 5 years old) from the audience to give her a taste of what it's like to wield the baton. Needless to say, she was a hit. Capt. Schofield says bringing a child on stage is a tradition with the band.

Another tradition is playing the anthems of every U.S. service branch. Audience members who are veterans or

loved ones of veterans stand during their respective anthems. At that moment, their pride in America is palpable. Capt. Schofield told me one of his favorite moments is after a concert, when he meets the public and hears what the performance meant to them. If you're wondering why military music groups are relevant during times of military conflict, I hope this *Living St. Louis* special explains it.

If you're a regular viewer of *Living St. Louis*, you may have noticed that I gravitate to stories featuring musicians. That preference is a reflection of my humble musical background. Like many middle-class children, I took piano lessons as a child. When my parents were unable to find an appropriate teacher to take me to the next level, I switched to flute. Unfortunately, my development as a student musician hit another roadblock when the laboratory high school I attended discontinued its modest music program the year after I enrolled. Who knows: If I'd had access to courses like music theory during those crucial years, my career might have taken a different path. I still play occasionally; but these days, it's just as much fun to profile the professionals. ■



Senior Airmen Misty Weaver (L) on clarinet and Linda Foster (center) on flute with clarinetist Master Sgt. Connie Galbraith.

Capt. Schofield leads the U.S.A.F. Band of Mid-America.

